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### Political and Social Dimensions of Civic Engagement

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Political and Social Dimensions of Civic Engagement:  
The Impact of Compulsory Community Service<sup>i</sup>

Civic engagement is a multi-dimensional concept reflecting people's psychological and associational attachment to their communities. As such, it incorporates such attitudinal and behavioural aspects of good citizenship as a sense of civic responsibility, a network of social connectedness, attentiveness to public life and a willingness to contribute to achieving society's collective goals. Researchers point to diverse evidence of deteriorating civic engagement, including lower levels of associational memberships (Putnam 2000), as well as declining levels of both voter turnout (Crewe, Fox and Alt 1977; Gray and Caul 2000; Wattenberg 1998; Flickinger and Studlar 1992) and membership in political parties (Katz and Mair 1992).

An increasing number of secondary school jurisdictions around the world have introduced mandatory community service programs as one means of combating declining levels of civic engagement (Keith 1994; Hodgkinson and Weitzman 1997; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995, Stukas, Snyder and Clary 1999; Fraser 1995; Nolin et al 1997). One third of US high schools, for example, are reported to require some form of mandated community service (Keilsmeier et al 2004) and one third of Canadian high school students (aged 15-19) were participating in a mandatory service program during 2000 (Hall, McKeown and Roberts 2001; Brown et al 2007). Despite the considerable public resources devoted to mandated community service programs, evidence of their effectiveness has been mixed, with researchers finding proof both of their success and their futility if a few key program characteristics are absent. Researchers consistently plead for a better understanding of the possible causal links between mandatory community service and subsequent attitudes and behaviour: "If service has an impact on participants, then we need to know more about the process through which servers

experience political awakening, acquire a sense of agency, or become committed to the community” (Reinders and Youniss 2006, 3).

This article employs as its case study the 1999 introduction of a 40 hour mandatory community service requirement imposed on all Ontario secondary school students. Because the changes were introduced along with a reduction in the length of high school, from five years to four, this produced a double cohort in the 2003 graduating class: a senior cohort that had not fulfilled the 40 hour requirement, and a junior cohort subject to the new requirements. This article takes advantage of this naturally occurring experiment to examine the impact of mandated community service on subsequent civic engagement. We locate community service programs within the larger literature on mandating civic behaviour and identify the different categories of potential benefits to establish how mandatory community service, as introduced in Ontario and more generally, differs from other forms of compulsory participation. This allows us to determine whether and how mandated community service experiences differ from those entered into willingly, as well as whether and why community service has an impact on particular political and social behaviours. By drawing respondents from the double cohort, we are able to test hypotheses about the differences between mandated and voluntary service, as well as the impact of service experiences and service longevity on subsequent civic engagement. This then enables us to address the impact of mandatory community service more generally. In particular, it allows us to identify whether functional understandings of volunteering and subsequent civic engagement also hold when service is mandated, and to identify features of effective mandatory service programs.

### **Literature Review**

There are three possible ways for mandated behaviour programs to attain their goals: they compel, directly, the very behaviours that are seen to be essential; they create behavioural habits, so that individuals might then begin to participate in other similar activities; last, the act of participating instils

in individuals the attitudes that then serve as motors for other beneficial behaviours. It is this third point that the compulsory service literature addresses, with three claims about the causal chain. First, researchers argue that orientations and patterns of engagement acquired in adolescence are important harbingers of civic engagement in adulthood. A voluminous body of research has documented the importance of experiences in adolescence for understanding subsequent orientations and behaviour (Austin, Sax and Avalos 1999; Beck and Jennings 1982; Hall, McKeown and Roberts 2001; Johnson, Beebe, Mortimer and Snyder 1998; Niemi and Junn 1998; Pancer and Pratt 1999; Planty and Regnier 2003; Sundeen and Raskoff 1994). Second, advocates point to a well-established relationship between volunteering activity and a syndrome of dispositions and behaviours reflective of responsible citizenship. Again, the evidence is strong and replicated in numerous studies (Eley 2001; Hart et al 2007; Janoski, Musick, and Wilson 1998; Johnson, Beebe, Mortimer, and Snyder 1998; Johnson-Kirkpatrick et al. 1998; Perry and Katula 2001; Quall 2001; Rosenthal et. al. 2001; Stolle and Hooghe 2004; Verba et. al. 1995). Third, and perhaps most contentiously, proponents of mandatory programs suggest that this relationship between volunteering and dispositions is not simply the conventional one in which attitudes shape behaviour, but is one involving reciprocal causation. As Janoski and his colleagues (1998) summarize this position, “people acquire the habit of volunteering because they are routinely placed in social situations and social relationships where the social skills and dispositions requisite for volunteer work are developed.” (Janoski, Musick and Wilson 1998, p. 498). If the practice of volunteering has these effects, then mandating such practice will bring benefits to those most in need of them – that is, those who would not engage in community service of their own accord (Avrahami and Dar 1993; Barber 1992; Campbell 2000; Giles and Eyler 1994; Sobus 1995).

As empirical research on the effectiveness of service learning and community service programs<sup>ii</sup> accumulates, proponents of this approach can certainly cite supportive evidence for their position. Service learning or community service programs in Canada and the United States have been

associated with improved civic responsibility (Blyth, Saito, and Berkas 1997; Locke, Rowe and Oliver 2004), political efficacy (Niemi et. al. 2000; Marks 1994 as cited in Niemi et. al. 2000), “civic inclusion” (Reese 1997 as cited in Niemi et. al. 2000), commitment to future volunteering (Giles and Eyler, 1994; Henderson et al 2007; Metz and Youniss 2005; Brown et al 2007) and enhanced civic skill levels (Niemi et. al. 2000), including political knowledge (Hamilton and Zeldin 1987). Many of these reviews explore programs introduced in a single town or school but the results are similar for more comprehensive investigations. Melchior’s (1997) review of the *Learn and Serve America Programs* in the U.S. reported a change – albeit a modest one – in attitudes of personal and social responsibility among participants.

While these findings suggest that community service programs – both mandated and voluntary – can have positive effects on participants, the process would seem to be a complex and conditional one. Among programs aimed at students, effects are clearest when service is “regular and sustained” (Niemi et al 2000; Hart et al 2007; Brown et al 2007; Henderson et al 2007), when there are broad opportunities for public action (Riedel 2002), or when the service experience provides students with an opportunity to “experience ... power” (Boyte 1991) or express their “voice” (Morgan and Matthew 2001) and a number of investigators have reported that effective service learning programs are integrated into the school curriculum and directed by faculty (Keeter and Andolina et al 2002; Keeter and Zukin et al 2002; Reinders and Youniss 2006; McCarthy and Tucker 2002; Primavera 1999). Student evaluations of the participation experience are also relevant. Factors such as the amount of enjoyment, support, respect and appreciation students encounter in their placements are very important in promoting a commitment to subsequent volunteering (Brown et al 2007; Melchior 1998; Morgan and Streb 2001; Pancer and Pratt 1999; Taylor and Pancer 2001, Taylor and Pancer 2007). The same kinds of contingencies have been cited for effects at the adult level (Arai 2000; Brown, Kenny, Turner and Prince 2000).

Critics of mandatory community service programs focus on two possible weaknesses, first that such programs have no discernible impact on any of the list of indicators that they seek to improve, and second that by compelling students to participate, any benefits associated with voluntary behaviour disappear (Bessant 2000; Brock 2001; Brown, Kenny, Turner, and Prince 2000; Deci and Ryan 1987; Goodin 2002; Nietz 1999; Turnbull and Fattore 1999). This last claim suggests that students may feel exploited when forced to volunteer (Warburton and Smith 2003, Batson, Jasnosi and Hanson 1978, Clary, Snyder and Stukas 1998, Kunda and Schwartz 1983), and that among those volunteering anyway, the mandatory element is particularly negative (Stukas, Snyder and Clary 1999). For others, mandated service is merely less effective. Planty and Regnier (2003) noted that although all volunteers – whether mandated or not – displayed higher rates of subsequent volunteering four years after their initial exposure, when volunteering habits were examined eight years later, this effect disappeared for those who were initially forced to volunteer (see also Planty, Bozick and Regnier 2006). Those claiming the programs have little to no effect have tended to focus on rates of volunteering following completion of the program (Niemi et al 2000; Keeter et al 2002a 2002b). This holds both for the Ontario program (Padanyi, Meinhard and Foster 2003) and others like it (Planty and Regnier 2003).

Mandatory community service is of course one example of mandated civic behaviour deemed to benefit both individual participants and society as a whole. While much of the research on compulsory community service has focused on the empirical impact of such programs, literature exploring the theoretical benefits of mandated behaviour is more developed in studies of that other mandated civic behaviour, voting. Together, the two literatures provide us with a better understanding of the possible causal chains between participation and desired outcomes. For our purposes, the voting research is most useful in its discussion of the extent to which individuals are transformed by their participation in mandated behaviours. For voting researchers, individuals benefit from compulsory voting because their participation protects them against the “marginalisation, hostility and sense of remoteness” found

in polities with low turnout (Jackman 1998). According to Lijphart (1997), individuals who are forced to vote will display increased interest, an increased willingness to bear the costs of staying informed, and, as more informed voters, will do a greater service to the polity as a whole, though empirical evidence to support this claim is often lacking (Loewen, Milner and Hicks 2008). Jakee and Sun note, for example, that no one has proved that mandating an individual to perform particular civic acts ‘transforms’ the individual sufficiently that future engagement becomes desirable to that person: “the transformative process is merely assumed” (64). Equally relevant for our purposes, there is little research investigating whether such a ‘transformation’ would survive a removal of the requirement to participate.<sup>iii</sup> It is to this question that the compulsory service literature directs most of its attention.

There are three chief challenges faced by those seeking to determine whether community service has an impact on civic engagement. First, there is the ‘apples and oranges’ problem, with ‘volunteering’ meaning different things to different individuals (Reinders and Youniss 2006). A student helping a neighbour to rake a lawn for two hours will likely acquire different skills and evaluate her experience differently from a student who has volunteered consistently in a homeless shelter. Certainly we know from the mandated service literature that the length and type of volunteering experience matters. This challenge is made easier when there is a degree of uniformity among participant definitions of volunteering. The forty-hour requirement for Ontario students goes some way to meeting this challenge. Second, the general volunteering research faces an obvious endogeneity problem (Metz and Youniss 2005, Trudeau and Devlin 1996). Adolescents who willingly offer their time to volunteer are obviously motivated to do so, and such students may carry with them into adulthood the same motivations that compelled them to volunteer in the first place. When adolescent volunteering was entered into willingly, we have no way to determine whether it was the act of participation or the initial motivation that would later influence adult behaviour. Isolating the effect of volunteering is thus made easier if we are able to distinguish between voluntary and mandatory

community service. Third, even among the literature exploring mandated community service, researchers are often forced to test their typical dependent variable – subsequent volunteering – in a hypothetical manner, asking about the future rather than measuring later behaviour after it occurs. Researchers have called for the greater use of experimental designs that measure student behaviour after it has occurred and hold constant the range of other factors we know to be influential in adolescent and adult volunteering: socio-economic factors, parental influence, and general political attitudes (Hart et al 2007). Because the current changes created a double cohort, the Ontario introduction of mandatory community service is an ideal case study to test the impact of such programs on civic engagement. Analysis of the program has thus far focussed on the nature of the volunteering experience, attitudes to volunteering in general and subsequent volunteering. To date there has not been a systematic investigation of whether mandatory service programs lead to service experiences that are different from voluntary service, or whether such programs have an impact on civic engagement. Since improved engagement and awareness are so central to the Ontario program it seems prudent to investigate the impact of mandatory community service on the political and social dimensions of civic engagement.

### **Context: The Ontario Compulsory Community Service Requirement**

In 1999 the Ontario Ministry of Education made several changes to high school requirements. It shortened the length of secondary school, from five years to four and in so doing brought the Ontario program into line with eight other provinces that had four-year grade 9 to 12 secondary programs.<sup>iv</sup> It removed a number of grade 13 level courses, compressing the learning cycle for courses in maths, sciences and English. It also added requirements. These included a grade 10 half year civics course, in which students would learn about the Canadian constitution and charter of rights, and, “to ensure that students develop awareness of civic responsibility” (Ontario. Ministry of Education 1999a, 6), a forty hour “community involvement requirement”, referred to as “mandatory volunteering” in the press. To



fulfill the community involvement requirement students had to volunteer forty hours of their time over the course of their four-year secondary school career in order to qualify for their high school diploma. The stated aims of the program were clear: “The community involvement requirement is designed to encourage students to develop awareness and understanding of civic responsibility and of the role they can play in supporting and strengthening their communities.” (Ontario. Ministry of Education 1999a, 9 See also Ontario. Ministry of Education 1999b).

Although the new curriculum offered both a required civics class and an out-of-school service requirement, the two changes were not linked. This was not, then, an example of service learning, where the goals of the volunteering program would be addressed explicitly in the classroom (Ash, Clayton and Moses 2007). Instead the changes were introduced as two separate requirements, each approaching civic responsibility from a different perspective. The civics course focused on political history and the legislative process, while the volunteering requirement focused on civic engagement and responsibility (Ontario. Ministry of Education 2000).

Experiences of the compulsory community service requirement varied across boards, schools and individuals (Brown et al 2007). Some boards relied on established community service agencies such as the United Way to publicize volunteering placements, while others left such tasks to individual schools. Within boards, some schools adopted a more proactive approach while others provided minimal guidance to students on how to identify volunteering opportunities.

Although this was a new requirement, particular boards and schools – mostly from Catholic school boards and private schools - had pre-existing volunteering requirements, many in excess of the forty-hour requirement introduced in 1999. This affected just under one third of Ontario secondary students. In academic year 2002-2003, when the double cohort class graduated, there were 729,688 students in Ontario secondary schools, 69% of whom were in public schools boards, 28.5% in Catholic school boards and two percent in private schools (Ontario. Ministry of Education 2003).<sup>v</sup> We therefore

have reason to believe that the new requirement introduced a substantial proportion of the Ontario secondary school population to “mandatory volunteering”.

The reduction in high school length provides us with two cohorts of graduating students in 2003, one subjected to the compulsory community service requirements (whether through public, Catholic or private schools) and one free from such a requirement. This allows us to determine whether, and under what conditions, mandated community service in high school has an impact on students’ subsequent civic engagement. Our research therefore addresses the following two specific questions:

1. Do students who complete mandatory community service programs have different types of volunteering experiences than those who approach them on a voluntary basis?
2. Does volunteering in high school have effects on social and political dimensions of civic engagement following graduation?

Answering the first question will provide us with possible insight into the conditions under which the answer to the second question is affirmative. Certainly research about the nature of volunteering leads us to assume that individuals who freely choose to volunteer might be more proactive in identifying their placements than those mandated to do so. Likewise, existing research suggests that mandated students might look back on their experiences less positively than those who entered community service willingly. Identifying any differences between the two groups, although interesting in itself, will help us to understand the ways in which compulsory community service can – and cannot – influence subsequent volunteering. We know from the literature that the volunteering experience itself has a mediating influence on any subsequent impact volunteering might have. This is consistent with the functional model of volunteering identified by Clary, Snyder and Omoto (Clary, Snyder, Ridge et al 1998, Omoto and Snyder 1995, Omoto, Snyder and Berghuis 1993) as well as the modification proposed by Pancer (Pancer and Pratt 1999; Taylor and Pancer (2007). Pancer and colleagues

demonstrate that the experience of volunteering, including how and why individuals initiate volunteering as well as whether and how it is sustained (Pancer and Pratt 1999), influence the subsequent impact of volunteering on a number of variables such as subsequent engagement, one's identity and, in young people, career preparation and decidedness (Taylor and Pancer 2007). This modified version of the functional model leads us to develop two hypotheses, first, that non-mandated volunteers will be more likely to evaluate their experiences positively, will be more likely to have engaged in sustained and regular volunteering and will be more likely to display the positive predictors of volunteering (such as a supportive family milieu, parental community involvement and higher income) than those who were mandated to volunteer.

If mandated volunteers employ different routes to identify their volunteering placements, if they evaluate their experiences less positively than others, then this raises the prospect that the conditions under which volunteering influences civic engagement cannot necessarily be replicated with a mandated experience. We know also that there are other possible variables that might mediate the impact of volunteering on subsequent civic engagement. In addition to the distinction between mandated and non-mandated service, or positive and negative experiences we must also add the duration of service. Our second hypothesis assumes that individuals who evaluated their volunteering experiences positively and who engaged in regular and sustained service will be more likely to record higher levels of participation for the social and political dimensions of civic engagement.

### **Methodology**

The admission of a 'double cohort' of students to Ontario's universities in the fall of 2003 provided a unique opportunity to study the effects of mandated and non-mandated community service. To exploit this opportunity, a team based at Wilfrid Laurier University mounted a program of research designed to follow the 'double cohort' through their university careers, comparing effects at different stages (Brown et al 2005, Brown et al 2007, Henderson et al 2007, Brown and Henderson 2008, Padanyi et al

2009, Padanyi et al 2010). The research reported here is based on a survey of these cohorts in the fall of 2004 as they began their second year at university.

The 2004 Volunteering and Civic Engagement Survey (VCES) was distributed during class time to second year courses with large enrolments at Wilfrid Laurier University during the first month of the academic year. Instructors then provided students with class time to complete the survey. The survey contains locator questions such as postal code and date of birth. This allows us to ensure that students did not complete the survey more than once and served as locator information for later panel studies.

The questionnaire includes four types of questions: questions probing demographic variables such as gender, age, religion, and household income; questions concerning experiences with high school community service, including avenues for finding placements, length and duration of placements, type of volunteering activity and evaluation of the volunteering experience; questions concerning civic engagement, measured here as participation in political activities, social activism, political interest, political efficacy and social group involvement; and questions to measure potential control variables such as the perceived parenting style of their guardians, parental volunteering activity and other activities such as part-time employment or extra-curricular pursuits.<sup>vi</sup> Most of the survey questions offered closed-ended responses, although in many cases the option 'Other' was followed by space for students to add information. This was particularly valuable for helping us to code the breadth of student experience with the service placement. Upon completion of the data collection phase, the survey results were processed by student research assistants who had completed two semesters of courses in research methods and statistics and who had received specific coding training from the investigators. Results were then checked by the investigators to ensure coding consistency.

The research design seeks to capitalise on a naturally occurring experiment – the simultaneous compression of high school from five years to four and the introduction of a compulsory community

service requirement – which will enable us to go some way to correcting the three methodological pitfalls highlighted earlier. By examining the impact of a single volunteering program, with a forty-hour lower limit on participation and a list of ascribed service opportunities, we can help to eliminate the ‘apples and oranges’ problem inherent in so much of the community service literature. Second, we can distinguish students who entered volunteering willingly from those who were mandated to do so. By isolating the effect of volunteering behaviour itself from the motivations to volunteer we can help to resolve – if only partially - the endogeneity problem. The study occurred ‘in the field’ and so there is obviously some variation across students. Some ‘mandated’ students, for example, volunteered more than forty hours, but we can control for this in our multivariate analysis. Some of the mandated cohort might well have chosen to volunteer of their own accord had they not been compelled to do so. We can also go some way to controlling for this by taking family setting (parenting models, income, parental community involvement) into account, since we know that these factors are critical in encouraging young people to volunteer. This, then, will enable us to isolate the impact of volunteering behaviour. Last, by studying students one year after they left high school we are not only asking about the volunteering experience soon after it occurred but we are also evaluating the dependent variable – subsequent social and political engagement – as it occurs.

The analysis that follows is based largely on a multivariate investigation and relies on binary logistic regression with key independent variables subject to demographic and social controls. In the first section we employ cohort as a dependent variable to determine whether the service experiences of the two cohorts differ. We then employ as dependent variables our various measures of civic engagement to determine which aspects of the volunteering experience, if any, are more likely to prompt continued engagement. To begin, however, we include an analysis of our respondents before addressing our specific research questions.

## **Description of Respondents**

The 2004 VCES was distributed to 1464 students. We excluded those not registered in their second year at university, and those not from Ontario, as well as those who did not answer the relevant questions about volunteering and those who belonged to the mandated cohort but did not admit to performing any volunteering. This reduced the effective sample size to 1250. In addition to excluding non-respondents, this serves to strengthen our quasi-experimental design by excluding other age-related and regional factors that might influence results.

We gathered information that would allow us to understand the possible mitigating factors that might affect levels of civic engagement.<sup>vii</sup> The proportion attending religious services regularly is low, at 10%, and the proportion professing ‘no religion’ as their denomination is 20%. By contrast 54% indicated that religion was stressed ‘somewhat’ or a ‘great deal’ at home. Exposure to politics at home was greater, with 62.7% reporting family political discussions ‘often’ or ‘sometimes’. Last, we learned that students face competing pressures on their time. One third indicated that they held a part-time job, with one fifth of the sample working more than 17 hours per week during the school term.

We know that university students tend to be distinct among high school leavers, both in terms of socio-economic status and propensity to volunteer. This is confirmed by our data. Just under half of the sample is from a household with a total family income greater than \$100,000 per year, which is considerably higher than the 2004 average Canadian household income (\$69,500).<sup>viii</sup> Only 15% of the sample was born outside the country. This is a smaller proportion than that for Canada as a whole (18%), and much smaller than that for the province of Ontario (26%). Importantly, we learned that our sample suggests a fairly even distribution between the junior and senior high school cohorts. Dividing our sample by the variable of interest, between those who were subject to mandatory community service requirements and those who were not, just under half of the sample (602) participated in a mandatory program while over half (691) did not.

## Analysis

### [Table 1 about here]

Our two cohorts display differing rates of volunteering during their high school years. Among the mandated cohort, 95% recalled volunteering during their high school years. We then excluded from the sample the respondents who indicated that they were required to volunteer but claimed not to have done so. Among the non-mandated cohort, 76.7% recalled volunteering (Appendix, Q6). The gap here is statistically significant, although it is also worth noting that the rate of volunteering among the non-mandated cohort is particularly high. This suggests that our sample might well underestimate the impact of mandatory volunteering since the comparison group displayed above average propensities for participation. While we expect differences in the *rates* of volunteering between these two cohorts, it is useful for us to determine if there are differences as well in the nature and quality of the community service experiences of mandated and non-mandated students. To address this question, Table 1 enables us to determine whether the mandated or non-mandated cohorts differ significantly in their volunteering experiences, including length and breadth of commitment, the sectors in which they served and how they secured their placements. Breadth/intensity of volunteering was measured here as a cumulative score of involvement across the six sectors (Appendix, Q8). The volunteering experience index (Appendix, Q7), was adapted from that used by Taylor and Pancer (1999) and includes eight questions tapping enjoyment, skill acquisition and the sense that service was meaningful or made a difference. The variables related to sector involvement and volunteer placement were presented to respondents as multiple questions (rather than separate categories within a single question) making it possible for respondents to indicate that they participated in multiple sectors, and employed multiple avenues to secure their volunteering opportunities. By employing cohort as the dependent variable, significant predictors would indicate that the two cohorts had different volunteering experiences when other possible aspects of the service experience were controlled. The table confirms that the two

cohorts used similar avenues to identify volunteering activities, and volunteered in similar sectors. Indeed the mandated and non-mandated cohorts differ only in two respects. Non-mandated students were more likely to have served in the school sector, and, perhaps following from that, were more likely to have been placed through the school. In terms of length, breadth, quality of experience and all other service options, however, the two cohorts are indistinguishable. These results largely confirm those found through bivariate analysis. Although bivariate analyses suggested that the non-mandated cohort was significantly more likely to volunteer with community or service clubs (61.4% to 54.6%) and less likely to have volunteered 'regularly for a year or more' (42.7% to 50.7%) such differences do not attain significance when we control for other variables.

### **Mandatory Community Service and Civic Engagement**

A major objective of Ontario's mandated high school volunteering program is to encourage a sense of civic engagement. The government's view, that mandatory community service will accomplish this objective, is predicated on the assumption that early exposure to community service encourages subsequent civic engagement by fostering appropriate orientations and patterns of behaviour. Our research permits an analysis of student orientations and behaviours in the years following their high school graduation. In this section, we address our second research question to determine whether volunteering in high school influences the social and political dimensions of civic engagement following graduation. We are, of course, interested not only in determining whether an effect can be identified but also in assessing the extent to which the effects of high school volunteering are conditional on certain aspects of the volunteering experience. Similar to other research (Niemi et al 2000, Hart et al 2007, Taylor and Pancer 2007), we would expect students who felt that they had positive high school volunteering experiences and who displayed longer commitments to volunteering would be more likely to record higher current civic engagement scores. With respect to civic engagement, we tapped two dimensions in our research instrument, social engagement and political



engagement.<sup>ix</sup> Why and how we have distinguished between these two dimensions is explained below.

In the social capital literature, participation in voluntary associations is thought to promote an awareness of the wider community and a commitment to shared interests. Since high school (HS) volunteer placements may represent the student's introduction to civil society, is there any evidence that HS volunteers are more socially engaged in their communities in the year following graduation? We employ four measures to capture social engagement. Two variables tap levels of participation in the wider community. These include participation in religious or cultural activities (Appendix, Q18e), and participation in organized sports activities (Appendix, Q18f). An additional two variables measure involvement within the university community. The first of these is a composite measure that includes participation in social groups such as fraternities, academic clubs, societies, cultural or social clubs or performing groups (Appendix, Q19c).<sup>x</sup> The second is a measure of participation in university intramural or extramural sports teams (Appendix, Q19b). In each case students were asked about the level of involvement over "the past twelve months".

In Table 2 we examine the impact of high school volunteering experiences on subsequent social group involvement. In this table, we have segmented our sample in four different ways to test the impact of volunteering on subsequent social engagement. We compare those who volunteered at all with those who did not, those who were mandated to volunteer with those who chose freely to do so, those who reported a positive experience with those reporting a negative experience, and those whose service lasted a year or more with those whose service was of a shorter duration. The first two of these comparisons allow us to identify any benefits accruing from volunteering but also to test whether the mandated aspect of volunteering 'poisons the well' for civic engagement. If non-mandated volunteers display greater levels of engagement than mandated volunteers, then the mandatory nature of the program can be seen as a significant obstacle to its intended consequences.

**[Table 2 about here]**

The table suggests, first, that involvement in sports activities whether within university or in the wider community, is largely unrelated to previous high school volunteering experiences. Involvement in other social group activities, however, is significantly related to three of the four high school variables. Students who volunteered, who had a positive experience, and who committed to at least one year with an organization tended to be more socially engaged in the subsequent year in religious and cultural activities or university social groups. As in the previous table, mandatory and non-mandatory students were mostly indistinguishable on these social involvement measures.

For the political dimension of civic engagement, we have developed six measures reflecting somewhat different expressions of involvement. The first is simply respondents' estimates of how involved they have been in "political activities" in the last twelve months (Appendix, Q18a). Second, and from the same battery, is their estimate of the extent of their involvement in "political activism" over the same period (Appendix, Q18c). Third, we asked students whether they were involved in three aspects of campus political life: student government, student political groups, and student publications (Appendix, Q19d). An index of "university political engagement" has been calculated as an additive function of their involvement in these three aspects. The fourth of our measures is an "index of political interest" that is based on the degree to which they expressed interest in Canadian and international politics, claimed to follow politics in the media, and discussed politics with their friends (Appendix, Q13). The fifth is a "political efficacy" scale that was computed for students as a function of their responses to five Likert-type items (Appendix, Q14). Finally, the sixth is their recollected turnout at the last (2004) federal election (Appendix, Q20)

Table 3 reports the same four comparisons for our various measures of subsequent political engagement. The first finding from the table is that levels of political engagement are relatively low. For our categories of *social* engagement, the lowest rate of participation recorded for any group comparison is about 11% for cultural activities, and rates of participation in all other activities exceed

twenty percent (and almost twice that for some sports activities); however for our categories of *political* engagement, the participation rates are in single digits for many activities. Levels of political interest are just below the midpoint in our scale and political efficacy scores are only marginally higher. Only with voter turnout do we see a sizable proportion of students engaged in a political activity.

The table reveals some significant effects. Former volunteers, relative to non-volunteers, have higher levels of efficacy, are more likely to be engaged in current political activities and are more likely to have voted in the last federal election. As with social group activity, positive evaluations of service and length of commitment are associated with greater political engagement. Negative assessments result in significantly lower levels of political activism and university political engagement. Those who volunteered a year or longer were more likely to engage in activism, and were more likely to participate in an on-campus political organization. Political efficacy scores for this group were also significantly higher than they were for those who committed less time to their volunteering placement. The mandated nature of the high school service experience appears not to be relevant.

**[Table 3 about here]**

For us to determine whether volunteering exerts an independent impact on civic engagement, and to clarify the impact of the volunteering experience itself, we must turn to multivariate analyses. Because the various sub-groups included in Tables 2 and 3 have overlapping membership, we cannot isolate with confidence the factors that compel an individual to participate in social capital-building activities or various political behaviours. In addition, Tables 2 and 3 do not allow us to determine whether the apparent effects of volunteering, or any aspect of the volunteering experience, survive demographic controls. We know that social background variables are relevant to the decision to volunteer just as they are to participation in social and political activities. The following section discusses the multivariate analyses.

Our analysis relies on multiple regressions that pit our independent variables and nine socio-demographic control variables against our dependent variables of social and political engagement.<sup>xi</sup> The nine social background variables are gender, level of household political discussion while a child, frequency of religious observance, degree of involvement in high school activities, the perceived parenting model of guardians, income, urban-rural location and parental levels of involvement (Appendix, Q2, Q3, Q4, Q5, Q10, Q11, Q12, Q15).

The results are summarized in tables 4 and 5. In all cases, unstandardized regression coefficients and standard errors are reported; however, since the metrics for all predictor variables have been converted to 0-1 format, the magnitude of the unstandardized coefficients provide a rough guide to their relative importance in the regression equation.

**[Table 4 about here]**

Table 4 summarizes the regressions for our measures of subsequent *social engagement*. This analysis suggests that most of the zero-order effects we observed in Table 2 were spurious. Gender, frequency of religious observance, high school activity and father's community involvement are all significant predictors of more than one of our dependent variables. Neither volunteering, nor the fulfillment of a mandatory community service requirement is positively associated with subsequent measures of social engagement. The duration and subjective assessment of the high school service experience help to explain subsequent involvement in religious and social group activities respectively but in all other cases such variables are not influential. Participation is explained more adequately by differences in students' social backgrounds.

**[Table 5 about here]**

Table 5 reports the regressions for our measures of subsequent *political engagement*. Here we see that family background and gender wield consistent influence. Men are more likely to engage in political activities and demonstrate higher political interest and those from larger cities are more likely

to be interested in politics and to participate in university political activities. Mother's community involvement is also a significant predictor of political activities. Unlike the social dimensions of civic engagement, father's community involvement does not influence any of our political measures of civic engagement. Perhaps unsurprisingly, frequency of family political discussions at home is a significant and positive predictor of participation in political activities, political activism, political interest and efficacy. Notwithstanding the impact of these controls we see that elements of the volunteering experience have a clear impact on political engagement. Specifically, those volunteering for at least a year in high school are more likely to engage in political activities both generally and in university; they also tend to score higher in political interest and in political efficacy. As well, those reporting a positive high school community service experience are more likely to engage in social activism and university-related political activities. The "non-mandated" cohort tends to score higher on social activism – indeed, this is the only dependent variable in the entire analysis for which the mandated - non-mandated distinction produces significant variation. This suggests that in one area at least, volunteering that is freely chosen rather than mandated has a greater effect on engagement afterwards.

Our results suggest that a student's high school experience with community service has no consistent effect on *social group engagement* in the first year after graduation. That is, a student's current involvements in religious or cultural activities, campus social and sports groups and organized sporting activities are not related to central features of the high school community service experience. On the other hand, that experience is related in a fairly consistent fashion to measures reflective of *political engagement*. While simply volunteering in high school has no effect, volunteering for at least a year makes it more likely that the student is later engaged in political activities both on and off campus, and that the student exhibits higher levels of political interest as well as higher levels of political efficacy. Similarly, reporting a positive high school service experience is related to current political activism, political activities on campus, and political efficacy. Last, truly voluntary

community service, rather than mandated volunteering, has a positive and significant impact on social activism, the only measure for which mandated service appears to produce different effects.

### **Conclusion**

Mandated community service experiences are not significantly different from those entered into willingly. Length and breadth of service is similar and, with the exception that high school students who were not mandated to perform community service tend to use their schools to identify volunteering opportunities and as places to perform service, the two cohorts are indistinguishable. This provides partial support for our first hypothesis.

The similarity of the two cohorts on most measures provides us with the opportunity to test the impact of different types of volunteering opportunities on subsequent civic engagement. Mandated community service can have a positive impact on civic engagement, just as it does on subsequent volunteering, with two important caveats. First, such effects are evident with respect to the political aspects of civic engagement but not social engagement. Second, such effects appear when individuals have engaged in their community service for one year or more, and when they evaluate their experiences positively. This confirms our second hypothesis and helps to clarify that the suggested modification (Pancer and Pratt 1999, Taylor and Pancer 2007) of the functional model of volunteering is worth pursuing, regardless of whether the service experience was entered into willingly.

Clearly, more research is needed to identify the characteristics of a positive community service experience. Taylor and Pancer (2007) explain that far more research addresses the predictors of volunteering engagement rather than addresses the experience of volunteering itself, something that Reinders and Youniss (2006) argue is central to understanding why volunteering influences subsequent engagement. Based on their inventory of service experience questions, Pancer and Pratt (1999) concluded that students who felt they made a difference were more likely to evaluate their experience positively, and this, together with a supportive social milieu was critical to further volunteering. Others

cite enjoyment and appreciation as central to positive evaluations and we likewise know that the ease with which students identify their volunteering opportunities improves service evaluations (Melchior 1998; Morgan and Streb 2001). Greater qualitative work would help to identify precisely the various dimensions to a positive volunteering experience.

These findings have relevance for the design of programs mandating civic behaviours. If program designers define success in terms of improved levels of civic engagement, programs structured to encourage short-term service commitments, or programs that give insufficient attention to the appropriateness of service placements, will be less effective. We have reason to believe that this has been acknowledged by those in charge of the Ontario program. A 2010 review altered the requirement slightly, allowing students to begin amassing their required service hours earlier in their high school careers – in the summer before grade nine (Ontario 2010). Such a move goes a small way to encouraging sustained commitment to a particular volunteering placement. Certainly assistance with securing placements and an increase in the number of hours required would maximize the ability of students to engage in sustained and regular service. Greater attention to the nature of placements, and ensuring that the quality of the placement was positive, would also help.

Several limitations of this research should be acknowledged. First, the program effects we have investigated here pertain to a short-term period following graduation. For the most part, students in this study graduated from high school 15 months before they completed our questionnaire. Whether the differences we detected will persist through their university years and beyond cannot of course be answered here and should be addressed in a subsequent study. Research dealing with other effects of community service programs, such as the likelihood of subsequent volunteering, have reported over-time persistence of program effects as much as nine years out, but mandated service may be an exception to this pattern (see, for example, Astin, Sax and Avalos 1999; Brown et al 2008; Hart et al 2007; Planty and Regnier 2003).

Second, there are at least two limitations associated with our use of university students for this study. On the one hand, using university students probably underestimates the differences in rates of high school community service between mandated and non-mandated high school graduates generally. This is because university-bound students are more likely to volunteer in high school whether mandated or not. Because our instrument does not allow us to distinguish mandated students who would have volunteered anyway from those who were drawn in solely by the program, the null effects attributed to mandating service in our analysis may not hold for the general high school graduation cohort.

Our use of university students may also lie behind the largely null relationship that we found between a student's high school community service and his or her subsequent social group engagement. Our particular sample of university students was wealthier than the Canadian and Ontario average but income was significantly related to only one of the nine dimensions of civic engagement. The sample had a larger proportion professing 'no religion' (20%) than all but two provinces in Canada (Alberta 23%, BC 35% according to the 2001 census), but religious observance figures broadly reflect Canadian trends. Religion was significantly related to two of our nine dimensions. In a sample with a more diverse range of family incomes we might have found that income is positively related to subsequent engagement. In addition, we know that universities are small communities that tend to make strong efforts to integrate students into the social life of the campus. For our study, the effect of these efforts may be to facilitate group involvement for all students, thus washing out or diluting any effects associated with the high school experience. Clearly, the use of university students to study the effects of these programs is an enormous convenience, but there is an urgent need to test the findings from such studies on high school graduates who were not university bound.

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>i</sup> This research was funded by a grant from Imagine Canada. The authors would like to thank the



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journal's anonymous reviewers for helpful comments and suggestions. Responsibility for the analysis to follow rests solely with the co-authors.

<sup>ii</sup> The terms “service learning” and “community service” are sometimes used interchangeably with reference to school programs, but many, if not most researchers now distinguish the two in terms of the degree to which they are integrated into the school curriculum. Service learning programs are well-integrated into course or school curricula while community service programs involve volunteering commitments by students that are largely stand-alone. By this definition, Ontario's government-mandated program is of the community service variety, although some non-public schools and Boards in the province make some efforts to tie the service requirement into the curriculum.

<sup>iii</sup> It is not possible to include a discussion of compulsory voting literature here. For analyses of its possible effects see Hill 2002; Hooghe and Pelleriaux; Blais, Massicotte and Yoshinaka 2004.

<sup>iv</sup> Secondary education in Quebec begins in grade 7 and runs until grade 11. Students may then proceed to a Collège d'enseignement général et professionnel (Cégep) for two years before entering university, or for three years if pursuing a technical diploma.

<sup>v</sup> This included 505,508 students in 606 public secondary schools, 208,291 students in 242 catholic secondary schools and 15,889 secondary students in 108 private schools.

<sup>vi</sup> The questionnaire successfully completed an ethics review by the university ethics board.

<sup>vii</sup> The sample is distributed fairly evenly across the main faculties at Wilfrid Laurier University. Almost half (635) are from the Faculty of Business, one third (418) are from the Faculty of Science, although here most are from psychology (274) or kinesiology (117). The remaining 233 students are from the Faculty of Arts, which at Wilfrid Laurier includes departments typically located in the humanities and social sciences. Regrouping the sample by broad disciplinary boundaries, 471 respondents, or 40%, are from the social sciences.

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<sup>viii</sup> This is the figure for economic families of two or more people, rather than the figure for ‘unattached’ individuals.

<sup>ix</sup> We also investigated the effects of the high school community service experience on subsequent community service. The results of that investigation have been reported in a separate study (Henderson et al 2007).

<sup>x</sup> We acknowledge that some of these groups, in particular fraternities, sororities or religious groups as well as social clubs that focus on volunteering or civic engagement such as United Way campaigns or the Model United Nations might well serve as predictors of further civic engagement, as well as serve as examples of involvement. We thank one of the journal’s anonymous reviewers for bringing this to our attention.

<sup>xi</sup> Our survey asked respondents to identify their major subject of study at university but not their courses. As a result we are unable to determine whether students who had pursued specific courses with field components were likely to perceive these as additional examples of mandated service, or indeed whether this had an impact on subsequent volunteering. We would like to thank one of the journal’s anonymous reviewers for bringing this to our attention